



Monday, 20 September 1993  
embargoed till 7.30pm

## MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN DECLARED BOOKER OF BOOKERS

Tonight Midnight's Children, by Salman Rushdie, is declared the Booker of Bookers, the book which three former chairmen of Booker Prize judges believe to be the best of the 26 novels that have won the Prize.

The judges were W L (Bill) Webb (the first chairman in 1969), David Holloway (1970) and Professor Malcolm Bradbury (1981).

Their comments:

**W L Webb:** "Reading through the chosen novels of Booker's first quarter of a century, we agreed eventually that two of them stood clear of the rest. Different as they are in form and intention, both Rushdie's Midnight's Children and William Golding's Rites of Passage are distinguished by a particular kind of energy in the writing - the kind of creative energy, we thought, in which as it registers a scene, a thought, the gesture that betrays it, you recognise a spark of the divine, of what's left to us of the divine. Both had more of the power to delight and astonish than we found elsewhere, but in the end we chose Midnight's Children because it was also a novel that changes the way we understand our rapidly changing world, and so helps us to feel at home with it."

**David Holloway:** "I am very happy that the winner should be Midnight's Children although I think that it would only be a whisker ahead - because of its innovative nature - of Rites of Passage, which in my view, purely as a novel, is the best of the 25 years. Midnight's Children is, I am fairly certain, the one that will be a classic of the times."

**Professor Malcolm Bradbury:** "I too would want to stress that we ended with a difficult choice between two works of outstanding quality. I think the novel in Britain in the post-war period has been rich, innovative and in many ways quite as important as the era

before - the novels of Lawrence, Joyce and so on. The two writers we singled out indicate that.

"Golding is probably the best British post-war novelist. Rites of Passage is a quite remarkable late book initiating his Maritime Trilogy. These three works, taken together, are a key work of our time. Midnight's Children is the best post post-war novel, a work where the rules of fiction are massively broken by an incredible artistic intelligence.

"That intelligence carries forward elements of the British tradition, especially in its writing about the Empire and India. It also draws into that tradition many elements from elsewhere - Indian folk story telling, South American magic realism. In doing that it changes the history of the novel for all of us and to me for that reason it has the greatest impact of all our 26 novels on present artistic consciousness."

- ends -

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## Notes:

### 1. Midnight's Children

Midnight's Children won the Booker Prize in 1981, when the shortlist also included Good Behaviour by Molly Keane, The Sirian Experiments by Doris Lessing, The Comfort of Strangers by Ian McEwan, Rhine Journey by Ann Schlee, Loitering with Intent by Muriel Spark and The White Hotel by DM Thomas.

The judges in 1981, chaired by Malcolm Bradbury, were Brian Aldiss, Joan Bakewell, Samuel Hynes and Hermione Lee.

The novel is set against the vast and colourful background of the India of this century and describes the fortunes of Saleem Sinai, one of 1,001 children born at the moment of the country's arrival at independence. When it was published by Jonathan Cape in 1981, it was hailed as 'one of the most important novels to come out of the English speaking world in this generation' by the New York Times.

As well as the Booker Prize, Midnight's Children won the James Tait Black Prize and the English Speaking Union Award.

Midnight's Children is available in three editions - Jonathan Cape hardback (£12.95); Picador paperback (£6.99) and a special paperback edition published to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Booker Prize, by Jonathan Cape (£9.99).

### 2. Salman Rushdie

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay in 1947, and has lived in England since 1961. He has written five novels, of which Midnight's Children was the second, and three works of non-fiction.

Salman Rushdie's novels are: Grimus, Midnight's Children, Shame, The Satanic Verses and Haroun and the Sea of Stories. His non-fiction includes The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey, Imaginary Homelands, and The Wizard of Oz, a film critique.

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